

**Full Council  
18 July 2024  
Agenda item 6 – Petitions and Deputations**

**To consider the following deputation submitted by Stand Up to Racism Dorset.**

**Deputation Leader: - Elaine White, to be accompanied by Candy Udwin, Lucy Hardwicke, Sally Davidson and Giovanna Lewis**

**Statement for Deputation: -**

It is now over a year since the announcement that the Bibby Stockholm barge would be used in Portland Port to house up to 500 people seeking asylum. This announcement was made without consultation with Dorset Council and was opposed by them.

Since then

- Dorset council received the first 25% of the funding from the Home Office amounting to £437.5k on 1st November 2023.
- Dorset council received a one off sum of £377000 for the Voluntary and Community Sector in relation to the barge.

## **OUR CONCERNS AND PROPOSALS**

### **1. THE BIBBY STOCKHOLM IS NOT A SUITABLE OR HUMANE PLACE TO HOUSE REFUGEES SEEKING ASYLUM**

See the Inquiry Report produced by Care4Calais, Stand Up To Racism Dorset and Portland Global Friendship Group which details the serious impact that the security, segregation and other aspects of barge life has on the residents. <https://care4calais.org/bibby-report>. This impact has only worsened since the number of residents has recently increased to over 400.

We remember Leonard Farruku who took his own life on the barge in December, and believe that all steps should be taken to prevent such a tragedy happening again.

#### **PROPOSAL ONE**

Dorset Council should continue to call for an end to the use of the Bibby Stockholm at Portland Port.

Specifically, the Council should:

- a) Insist that it is consulted before any extension to the original 18 month contract.
- b) Consider how to take any possible steps to end the barge's use.

### **2. THERE ARE NO ADDITIONAL RESOURCES PROVIDED FOR LOCAL RESIDENTS**

We understand that some of the £437.5k so far received by the Council from the Home Office has been spent on staff costs and additional security.

Additional funding for GP provision has been provided to the NHS for a GP practice in Bournemouth.

## **PROPOSAL TWO**

The Council should:

- a) Use the funding provided by the Home Office, which could total up to £1.75 million, to benefit local residents as well as those on the barge, which would help integration and break down barriers. One example would be by providing community or sports facilities that could be used by all.
- b) Support the campaign to fully reopen Portland hospital with services for local residents as well as those on the Bibby Stockholm.

### **3. SUPPORT FOR BARGE RESIDENTS IS INADEQUATE**

A Community Liaison Coordinator has now been appointed by the Council and this has led to some increase in the support and activity being organised by the Council. However there are still huge gaps in the provision which Portland Global Friendship Group (PGFG an entirely voluntary group set up on the Island a year ago, without any funding support from the Council) has been trying to fill.

#### *ACTIVITIES & INTEGRATION*

PGFG provides the majority of English lessons, conversation clubs, volunteering opportunities, sporting cultural and social activities available to the residents.

#### *CLOTHING, SHOES & OTHER REQUIREMENTS*

The Council originally planned to commission a charity to run a "Dignity Shop" to provide the residents with clothing, shoes and toiletries. We understand this did not proceed because of problems with finding a venue.

This means PGFG has had to provide the residents with these through donations, crowdfunding and some support from charities. We have also been providing Sim cards, and second hand phones since the provision of laptops on the barge is completely inadequate and the wifi often does not work. This is done through entirely voluntary effort without the provision from the council of either funding or venues, often using people's own homes for storage of items. We are unwilling to see residents who do not have a jacket or shoes go needy, but especially with the increased number and turnover of residents on the barge, we are no longer able to meet everyone's needs.

#### *OTHER SUPPORT*

There is also a huge need for support with dealing with various practical tasks and form filling, registering to work, hospital appointments etc. We have tried to organise this. There is no current plan from the council to provide such support.

## **PROPOSAL THREE**

The Council should urgently reinstate the plan to commission the provision of clothing, toiletries and other items, as well as consider how other support required is provided.

#### **4. INCREASE IN RACIAL TENSION IN WEYMOUTH & PORTLAND**

At the time of the Bibby Stockholm's arrival in Portland last year, there was a large amount of ignorance and fear about its impact locally. This was fuelled by the language used by the government at the time, by some individuals locally, and by visits from right wing groups from out of Dorset such as the Patriotic Alternative. During last summer, attempts to organise local people against refugees with slogans such as "stop the invasion" reached their height.

Stand Up To Racism Dorset held public meetings, demonstrations, street stalls and other events to argue that the barge was not right for asylum seekers or local people, but that the refugees were not to blame and should be welcomed. Any racist statements were publicly called out. Portland Global Friendship Group was formed and organised public welcomes for the refugees when they arrived. Overall, this led to the organised public opposition to the refugees largely subsiding or becoming more hidden.

However, there is still a huge amount of misinformation, and sometimes open hatred, shared about the Bibby residents both online and in the community. This includes the lies that Bibby residents have harassed local children (confirmed by the police not to be true), or that they have harassed, or even raped or murdered local women (again with absolutely no substance). Volunteers who support the refugees have been abused on-line and in person. This has led to the arrest of one Portland resident for harassment. There is now a situation where racism towards local people of colour has increased, and the refugees could be put at risk if tensions escalated.

We believe this situation requires education and community integration, not increased security. Bibby residents have been to visit and speak in some local community, education, religious and workplace settings. Community events or activities which bring people together break down barriers and undercut stereotypes.

#### **PROPOSAL FOUR**

Dorset Council should urgently consider a public campaign to welcome refugees (this should include all those in the area, not just on the Bibby stockholm). This could include an education program for local community organisations, schools and others, as well as public rebuttals of some of the misinformation that is circulated.

#### **Procedural note for members:-**

Extract from the Council's Procedural Rules:-

##### **10.10 Presenting a deputation at the meeting**

(a) The Chair will invite the Deputation Leader to read out any statement/explanation given as part of the details of the deputation or a summary of it. If the Deputation Leader who has submitted the deputation is unable to be present, the Chair may invite another person on the deputation to read it out.

(b) A statement/explanation read out about a deputation shall not exceed five minutes unless the Chair expressly allows.

#### 10.11 Discussion about a deputation

Unless the Chair decides otherwise, no discussion will take place about any deputation presented pursuant to these procedure rules.

#### 10.12 Replying to a deputation

Any person identified as being the person who will reply to a deputation may reply in such matter as s/he considers appropriate.